

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SNM-02 AID-20 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 COME-00 EB-11 FRB-02 TRSE-00

XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 SY-10

USSS-00 CU-04 SCEM-02 INT-08 SCI-06 AGR-20 TAR-02

FPC-01 DRC-01 /243 W

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P R 240541Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8485

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA

DEA HQS WASHDC

CINCPAC

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM THAI

13TH ADVON UDORN THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 18299

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: READINGS OF THE BANGKOK POLITICAL BAROMETER THROUGH

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NOVEMBER 23

REF: BANGKOK 17946

SUMMARY: LABOR STRIKES AND PRICE INCREASES CONSUMED MUCH NEWSPRINT OVER THE PAST WEEK. THAI STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS RECEIVED EQUAL SPACE AS STUDENTS EXHIBITED A SHORT FUSED APPROACH TO A NUMBER OF SITUATIONS THROUGH THE COUNTRY. NERVOUS ABOUT WIDESPREAD STUDENT AGITATION, PARTICULARLY AGAINST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THE GOVERNMENT CAUTIONED THAT DEMONSTRATIONS "VIOLATED PEACE AND ORDER AND CAN BE INTERPRETED AS AN IMPROPER EXECUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM." THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND RESIGNED RECENTLY TO MAKE WAY FOR REORGANIZATIONAL MOVES. THE ARRIVAL OF AMBASSADOR KINTNER SPARKED A FLURRY OF PRESS ARTICLES DISCUSSING USG-RTG RELATIONS. THE LONG ARM OF DETHANOMIZATION HAS REACHED THE ROYAL THAI NAVY WITH THE ANNOUNCED TRANSFER OR PROMOTION OF 56 OFFICERS. END SUMMARY.

1. STRIKES AND WORK STOPPAGES OCCURRED AMONG WORKERS IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES: RAILWAY, BANGKOK TELEPHONE, STEEL IN SAMUT PRAKAN PROVINCE, SOME BANKS IN BANGKOK, AND THE BANGKOK MUNICIPAL WATERWORK'S AUTHORITY. EVEN SAMLOR AND TAXI DRIVERS DEMONSTRATED. THE GOVERNOR OF THE ROYAL STATE RAILWAY RESIGNED AS A RESULT OF THAILAND'S FIRST NATIONWIDE, 5 1/2 HOUR, RAIL STRIKE (BANGKOK 18247). THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE THAI RED CROSS SOCIETY RESIGNED FOLLOWING PROTESTS BY EMPLOYEES OF THE RED CROSS AND OF THE ADJACENT CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL. AS WITH UP-COUNTRY DEMONSTRATIONS, THESE LABOR STRIKES WERE BOTH A REACTION TO INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, A COMPLAINT AGAINST INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION, AND A RELEASE OF LONG EXISTING DISSATISFACTIONS.

2. THE CABINET ANNOUNCED SWEEPING CHANGES IN SALES, EXCISE, AND DUTY TAXES NOVEMBER 21. THE MOVE WAS CONSIDERED ANTI-INFLATIONARY AND A STEP TOWARD REDUCING PRICES ON ITEMS OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE TO LOWER INCOME GROUPS. THESE CHANGES BASICALLY LOWERED THE TAXES ON LOCALLY PRODUCED ITEMS, AND RAISED THE TAXES ON IMPORTED AND DOMESTIC

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LUXURY ITEMS, SUCH AS LIQUOR AND CIGARETTES. (BANGKOK 18193)

3. THE CRUDE OIL SITUATION, WITH THE RECENT INCREASE IN PRICES AND EMERGING BLACKMARKETING IN THAILAND, RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC ATTENTION. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SUKICH NIMMANHAEMIN, INDUSTRY MINISTER OSOT KOSIN, AND THREE OTHER INDUSTRY OFFICIALS DISCUSSED THE OIL CRISIS

OVER NATIONAL TELEVISION NOVEMBER 21. CONCEDED TO THE INFLATIONARY PRESSURES LINKED TO CRUDE OIL, THE CABINET ALLOWED BUS COMPANIES IN BANGKOK TO INCREASE THEIR BASIC FARES 50 PERCENT TO ALMOST 4 CENTS. COINCIDENTALLY, GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND PRIVATE BUSINESSES HAVE ANNOUNCED VARIOUS GAS, OIL, AND ELECTRICITY SAVING MEASURES.

4. THAI STUDENTS INCREASINGLY DEMONSTRATED AN EMOTIONAL AND SHORT FUSED APPROACH TO A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS. MOST OF THE STUDENTS IN THESE SPONTANEOUS DEMONSTRATIONS WERE FROM VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS, RATHER THAN FROM THE MORE POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED UNIVERSITIES. VOCATIONAL STUDENTS IMMEDIATELY DEMONSTRATED AGAINST THE SWEDISH EMBASSY AND THE PRESTIGIOUS "SIAM RATH" FOR A LETTER THE NEWSPAPER PRINTED FROM A THAI WITH SWEDISH CITIZENSHIP. THE LETTER WAS DEROGATORY OF THE KING. THE DEMONSTRATION ENDED AFTER AN ALL NIGHT VIGIL IN LUMPINI PARK. THE EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF SIAM RATH ENDED UP WITH THE POLICE LIFTING HIS LICENSE. THE PROBLEM OF NAIVE ADOLESCENTS, UNCERTAIN HOW TO HANDLE THEIR NEWLY DISCOVERED LEVERAGE, WILL CONTINUE TO BE A SIGNIFICANT SHORT TERM PROBLEM.

5. NERVOUS ABOUT WIDESPREAD STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, PARTICULARLY AGAINST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (BANGKOK 17960), THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED NOVEMBER 20 THAT FUTURE COMPLAINTS SHOULD BE SENT TO THE RESPECTIVE MINISTRIES. THE ANNOUNCEMENT ASSURED THAT VALID CRITICISMS WOULD BE ACTED UPON, BUT IT CAUTIONED THAT DEMONSTRATIONS "VIOLATE PEACE AND ORDER IN THE COUNTRY, AND CAN BE INTERPRETED AS AN IMPROPER EXECUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM." THE ANNOUNCEMENT DID NOT CLAMP A BAN ON DEMONSTRATIONS, BUT ASKED THE PEOPLE FOR THEIR COOPERATION (FBIS BANGKOK CONFIDENTIAL

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D201526 NOVEMBER 73). SIMULTANEOUSLY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR HAS REPORTEDLY ISSUED INSTRUCTIONS TO PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ON HOW TO HANDLE PROTESTORS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT BANGKOK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS ORCHESTRATED UP-COUNTRY DEMONSTRATIONS, WHICH SEEM TO BE SPONTANEOUS, LOCALIZED, AND BUILT ON NARROW ISSUES.

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SNM-02 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 COME-00 EB-11 FRB-02

TRSE-00 XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01

SY-10 USSS-00 CU-04 SCEM-02 INT-08 SCI-06 AGR-20

TAR-02 FPC-01 DRC-01 /243 W

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P R 240541Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8486

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 18299

6. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) RESIGNED RECENTLY TO MAKE WAY FOR A REORGANIZATION. ELECTIONS ARE TO BE HELD WITHIN TWO WEEKS. THE NSCT LEADERSHIP WAS SUBJECT TO A NUMBER OF CRITICISMS, ONE OF THE MOST TELLING OF WHICH WAS THAT IT
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HAD ABANDONED ITS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE CRUCIAL HOURS OF OCTOBER 13-14, AND THAT IT HAD SIDED WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO CONDEMN THE CONTINUED VIOLENCE OF OCTOBER 14.

ONCE THE ELECTION HAS BEEN HELD, THE NSCT LEADERSHIP CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVIST, YET NONETHELESS MODERATE ROLE (SEPTTEL).

7. THE ARRIVAL OF AMBASSADOR KINTNER SPARKED A FLURRY OF PRESS ARTICLES DISCUSSING USG-RTG RELATIONS. A MODERATE EDITORIAL IN "THE NATION" NOVEMBER 20 COMMENTED THAT THE NEW AMBASSADOR ARRIVES AT A UNIQUE TIME IN THAI HISTORY AND ARGUED THAT NOW IS THE TIME FOR GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN RTG-USG RELATIONS. ANOTHER COLUMNIST CALLED ON THE RTG TO STRENGTHEN ITSELF SO THAT IT CAN DEAL WITH THE USG AS AN EQUAL. A SMALL GROUP OF STUDENTS PRINTED A LEAFLET HIGHLY CRITICAL OF US FOREIGN POLICY AND THE AMBASSADOR, AND AN INSIPID ARTICLE IN A THAI-LANGUAGE PAPER ILLUSTRATED THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE BANGKOK PRESS. THAILAND HAS ENTERED THE STAGE WHERE THERE WILL BE MORE OPEN PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF USG-RTG RELATIONS, NOT ALL OF WHICH WILL BE COMPLIMENTARY OF THE USG. (BANGKOK 18107, 18190).

8. THE ROYAL THAI NAVY, LONG THE STEP CHILD OF THE THAI ARMED FORCES, HAS RECENTLY UNDERGONE THE TRAUMA OF REASSIGNMENTS DIRECTED TOWARD SIDE TRACKING SUPPORTERS OF THE EXILED LEADERS. THE SHAKE-UP STARTED WITH THE NAVAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, AND INCLUDES THE TRANSFER OR PROMOTION OF 55 OTHER OFFICERS. A FEW OFFICERS ONCE OUT OF FAVOR, LIKE REAR ADMIRAL PRASONG PIBULSONGKHRAM, HAVE RETURNED TO THE NAVY FOLD. THE NAVY SHAKEUP MAY WELL PRESAGE THAT THE STING OF REORGANIZATION WILL ALSO BE FELT IN THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE. (BANGKOK 18073)

9. THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING COMMITTEE (CDC) IS MAKING STEADY PROGRESS TOWARD ITS THREE MONTH DEADLINE. THROUGH PRESS RELEASES AND NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS, CDC MEMBERS CONFIRM THAT THE EMERGING DOCUMENT, WHICH IS MODELLED ON THE 1949 CONSTITUTION, WILL CONTAIN CLAUSES DESIGNED TO PRECLUDE PAST ABUSES OF POWER. THE DOCUMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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THEREFORE, WILL PROBABLY BE ONE OF THE LONGEST THAI CONSTITUTIONS EVER WRITTEN. THE CDC APPEARS TO FAVOR A FULLY ELECTED BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE, AND HAS INCLUDED A NUMBER OF PROVISIONS INTENDED TO NUDGE THE NEW GOVERNMENT INTO ACCEPTING INCREASED SOCIAL WELFARE RESPONSIBILITIES. THE CDC IS NOT, HOWEVER, EXPECTED TO MAKE ANY GREAT SOCIAL LEAPS FORWARD. THE SOLE WOMAN ON THE COMMITTEE HAS DESCRIBED AT LENGTH HER UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO CONVINCE HER MODERATE MALE PEERS TO ABOLISH DISCRIMINATION BY SEX. (BANGKOK 18192).

KINTNER

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